part of the natives' diet? Do not its alluvia yield the cotton, tobacco and indigo which are indispensable to the Laotian, and does not the river itself, in the high water period, transport the wood needed for cooking food, so that, in a manner of speaking, it has only to recede in order to collect firewood? Finally, from the commercial point of view, is not the Mékong the great fluvial artery and the only practical route joining Yunnan to Saigon? M. Blancsubé, a former deputy for Cochinchina, envisaged the use to which the Mékong could be put when he said:

"I see in our establishment throughout the whole Mékong valley, the means of making flow into Saigon the products of thirty kingdoms and tribes scattered along the river, as well as those of Yunnan and those of the interior provinces of China. I see the means of making Saigon into one of the greatest storehouses in the world, and making it the queen of the Far East."

The vision is a tempting one. Unfortunately, the reality is quite another thing. On the one hand the orientation of trade towards Bangkok was climaxed by the completion of the Korat railroad, while on our part the problem of making the Mékong navigable from Yunnan to the sea is still far from having been solved.

Looked at as a whole, the Mékong flows first in a largely north and south direction as far as Ban-Houé-Pak-Kop (1) (where the Houé-

(1) Pak = mouth, junction of rivers.

Kop flows into its right bank), then turns suddenly eastward in the gorge which it has cut around the plateau which forms the last stage of the Sib-Song-Pahn-Na.

Macey (2) says, in this connection, that one can almost certainly

(2) "Cinq ans au Laos." Lecture delivered before the Society of Commercial Geography [Société de Géographie commerciale] on November 19, 1895.

accept the hypothesis that in a relatively recent geological epoch the Mékong flowed into the sea in the Gulf of Siam through the valley of the present-day Ménam. The other branch of the Mékong which goes down to the sea through Cambodia and Cochinchina was a continuation of the Nam-Hou. It was only when an upheaval or

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"What makes everything easy and is used for everything is this hollow wood, at once so solid and so light, the incomparable bamboo. In France we see it only in the form of pleasant but useless little articles of furniture. Here bamboo is sufficient to every task. It provides the whole house, frame as well as walls. The inner walls and floors are made of matted bamboo lathwork. Yet such a house, with its furniture, bed, tables, various accessories and its luxury objects, if you are a person of refinement, can be improvised for you in a space of two hours wherever you want.

"Has a bridge been washed out? In two hours, thanks to this wood which is easy to manage and to work, men will have made a new bridge. One is especially struck, at the beginning of this life which is so free and, more than any other, independent of men and things, by the great simplicity and ingenuity of all the procedures. Objects are rudimentary but practical, easy to make, soon ready and simple to repair. Everyone knows how to build ordinary furnishings, and no interruptions are caused here as they are when even the slightest damage occurs to one of our highly developed utensils, which only a specialist knows how to repair.

"A bamboo tube is a safe place for your maps and papers. It is a drinking glass, and it is also a pipe for smokers. On a larger scale, it is a bucket for carrying water, and the receptacle for all liquid and solid provisions. When provided with a handle it serves as a pot for the Laotians to cook their rice in, or to prepare syrup from the sugar palm. When torn into thongs it is used as rope and string. Ligatures of sapeks are threaded on kelates, or bamboo filaments, and this is what makes our new Indo-Chinese sou, with its round hole in the middle, so impractical. Those who preside over the striking of our coins are unaware that the kelate is square, a fact which the first comer from the interior could have told them. Baskets of all kinds are made with these same kelates for holding and transporting material. Hats are also made of them to provide shelter from the sun and rain. At night, when the stage of your journey is too long and you have to continue after nightfall even at the risk of meeting a tiger, setting fire to a bamboo branch is enough to frighten any off and to light your way. And not only is bamboo used to make torches, hats, string, dishes, furniture, houses and bridges, but it also serves as animal fodder and even as food for the natives, who eat the tenderest shoots as we would eat asparagus.